

feebly united elements of Saxon power was imposed the strong Norman executive. From the Norman conquest the struggle for freedom begun. The Church was the first leader against feudal brutality. And it seems as though the preservation of liberty was owing to the Church. For although after the compromise on the Hildebrandic claims, the Church was generally to be found on the side of authority and absolutism, yet in the three great crises of 1215, 1297 and 1688, it found itself on the side of the national party. To accomplish its ends, the Church has by degrees found that its proper sphere of influence is, not to give sanction to despotism, but to influence conduct, to form character, to mould the conscience. From the hands of the Church, the leadership passed to the Baronage. Like the aristocracies of birth in the ancient city state, they form in the modern nation the connecting link between monarchy and democracy. In England the leaders in the struggle for the constitution and for the limitation of the royal power were the great feudal land-owners. The Church through its possession of land and because its privileges were open to all, formed a connecting link between baronage and commonalty. And by what almost seemed a series of accidents class distinctions were prevented from developing into legally separate estates. This fact has contributed most materially to national growth, to the blending of the various elements of political moment into one national body. Class distinctions were a marked feature of mediæval life and gave to that life much of its picturesqueness. The baron, the knight of the shire, the yeoman, the tenant, the villein, the merchant, the trader, the artisan, were distinct figures in the picture. But of all the attempts made to perpetuate legally the distinctions of society, the personal summons by writ to the House of Lords is the only one that remains. The growth of the commons as the preponderating element in the constitution, and the final recognition of their claim to ultimate sovereignty, are perhaps traceable to three circumstances: the union in one house of the representatives of the counties and the representatives of the towns; the holding of the balance of power between the contending factions of the baronage; the gradual acceptance of the fundamental principle that what concerns all should be treated of by all.